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Lives on the Line: American Families and the Struggle to Make Ends Meet. Martha Shirk, Neil G. Bennett and J. Lawrence Aber.

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The book offers personalized accounts of a variety of campaigns fought by women on several fronts. It begins with the airline stewardesses who successfully challenged the practice of retiring older women and those who married. Succeeding chapters range over the founding of NOW, the battle over the ERA, the rights of women in academic institutions, the enhanced representation of women in politics, abortion and lesbian rights and many other issues. Davis also emphasizes the fact that the struggle is not over. Indeed, the campaign for enhanced equality and rights has been vigorously opposed by those who believe that women should fulfill traditional maternal and housekeeping roles.

This is a wonderfully accessible and enjoyable book which should be read by all who are interested in the way personal struggles can create wider social movements that address social ills. Rich in detail and narrative, it will inspire and energize all of those who believe that it is possible to bring about meaningful social change.

Martha Shirk, Neil G. Bennett and J. Lawrence Aber, *Lives on the Line: American Families and the Struggle to Make Ends Meet*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999. \$24.00 hardcover.

Readers may respond with little enthusiasm to the publication of yet another book on the subject of poverty in America. Poverty has become a major topic subject of scholarly research and numerous statistical analysis, policy analyses and ethnographic studies of poverty have appeared in recent years. While some may argue that little more needs to be said on the subject, the problem of poverty remains critical, limiting the life chances and aspirations of millions of people. The need for policy relevant research that may eventually result in effective action is an urgent one.

In this highly readable book, Shirk, Bennett and Aber examine different aspects of poverty. Shirk uses her journalistic skills to provide descriptive personal profiles of ten American families living in poverty. The ten families are drawn from different parts of the United States and include people of very different backgrounds and circumstances. Both urban and rural families are included. The profiles are reminiscent of Oscar Lewis's ethnographies and provide a particularly realistic account of that it is like to live in conditions of deprivation and adverse opportunity. Linking the profiles to statistical data about poverty, Bennett

draws on his professional skills as a demographer to show how the subjective experience of poverty translates into national data of disturbing dimensions. Aber, in turn, links the ethnographic and statistical data to an interpretation of the causes of poverty and offers policy proposals for its amelioration.

The book stresses the fact that poverty in America thrives in a context of affluence. In many nations, poverty is directly associated with a lack of economic development. In the United States, on the other hand, its causes lie in a multiplicity of factors that operate at both the individual and societal level. The book suggests that low educational attainment, young parenthood and a lack of adequately remunerated jobs are of primary importance. The fact that these causal factors have not been addressed is, they argue, nothing short of a national disgrace. The United States is notorious for having the highest rate of child poverty in the Western, industrial world.

The authors have not only produced a readable and insightful account of what it is like to be poor in America, but effectively combine statistical findings and policy recommendations to offer a comprehensive view of the problem. The book will be of particular value to undergraduate students who will find that the linking of narrative, statistical data and policy analysis offers meaningful insights into poverty in America today.

Maurice Mullard and Paul Spicker, *Social Policy in a Changing Society*. New York: Routledge, 1999. \$80.00 hardcover, \$24.88 papercover.

The study of social policy has historically been a descriptive exercise dominated by descriptive accounts of historical events, legislative provisions and administrative practices. The lack of theoretical sophistication in the field has long been noted by commentators in other disciplines who have effectively used theory to frame their own analyses of social policy issues. Over the years, social policy writers within social work and social administration have responded to these criticisms and today, theoretical insights are much more widely used.

This book shows how effectively theory can be used in a textbook to inform social work and social administration students of the assumptions that pervade the policy making and